

Message Text

SECRET

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S E C R E T BRUSSELS 05041

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MNUC, NATO, NPG, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN GOVERNMENT THINKING ON THE ENHANCED
RADIATION WEAPON

REF: BRUSSELS 3462

1. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE FOR ADVISING
FOREIGN MINISTER ON DEFENSE POLICY GAVE US A RUNDOWN
ON MARCH 14 ON HOW BELGIAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT REPEAT MIGHT
HANDLE THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ISSUE OF THE ER/RB
WEAPON.

2. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY BELIEVES THAT IF BELGIUM IS PUSHED
INTO MAKING A DECISION IN THE NEAR FUTURE (I.E. BY THE
TIME OF THE NATO MEETING IN WASHINGTON) THE BELGIAN
DECISION WILL HAVE TO BE NEGATIVE. ACCORDING TO THEIR
ANALYSIS, NOT ENOUGH TIME HAS YET ELAPSED TO PERMIT
THE ER/RB QUESTION TO DROP FROM PUBLIC ATTENTION. WE
WERE FURTHER TOLD THAT FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET IS
DELIBERATELY STAYING AWAY FROM PARLIAMENT SO THAT HE
CANNOT BE QUESTIONED ON THE ISSUE.

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3. FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET'S CLOSEST PERSONAL ADVISORS
ON DEFENSE ISSUES HAVE WARNED HIM THAT IT WOULD BE
POLITICALLY SUICIDE FOR HIM TO COME OUT FOR THE ER/RB
WEAPON IN LIGHT OF THE PRESENT PUBLIC POSITION OF THE
SOCIALIST PARTY TO WHICH HE BELONGS ON THE QUESTION
(BRUSSELS 2363).

4. SIMONET, THUS, MAY PROPOSE TURNING AROUND THE U.S. POSITION SET FORTH IN THE SECRETARY'S LETTER ON THE SUBJECT (STATE 44903), I.E., HE MAY SUGGEST (AND WE STRESS THAT NO DECISIONS IN THIS REGARD HAVE YET BEEN TAKEN) THAT BELGIUM TAKE AN INITIAL, TIME-LIMITED POSITION AGAINST THE ER/RB WEAPON. ACCORDING TO THIS SCENARIO, BELGIUM WOULD SAY THAT MANUFACTURE OF THE ER/RB WEAPON IS STRICTLY A MATTER FOR THE USG ALONE. DEPLOYMENT IS ANOTHER MATTER, WHICH DOES CONCERN BELGIUM, AND BELGIUM WOULD REFUSE PERMISSION FOR SUCH A DEPLOYMENT ON BELGIAN TERRITORY FOR A PERIOD OF TWO YEARS. DURING THIS TWO YEAR PERIOD, THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT (AND LOCAL PUBLIC OPINION) COULD OBSERVE WHETHER THE SOVIETS WERE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN EVEN LIMITED ARMS CONTROL. IF NO PROGRESS WERE MADE WITHIN THE TWO YEAR PERIOD, BELGIUM MIGHT USE SUCH LACK OF PROGRESS AS A REASON TO PERMIT DEPLOYMENT OF THE ER/RB WEAPON.

5. FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET'S ADVISORS BELIEVE THIS SCENARIO WOULD PROTECT HIM FROM A SERIOUS SPLIT WITH THE BULK OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY (WHICH MIGHT BE POLITICALLY FATAL TO HIM) AND WOULD FURTHER BE CONSISTENT WITH TRADITIONAL BELGIAN GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO FOSTER DISARMAMENT AND ENCOURAGE DETENTE. IT COULD ALSO (EVENTUALLY) PERMIT BELGIUM TO JOIN THE U.S. AND WEST GERMANY IN PROVIDING FOR A BETTER DEFENSE AGAINST SOVIET ARMOR.

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6. OUR SOURCE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE BELGIANS HAVE NOT BEEN CONVINCED THAT A LINKAGE BETWEEN THE ER/RB WEAPON AND THE SS-20 IS REALISTIC. THEY HAVE NOTED THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE ALREADY PUBLICLY REJECTED SUCH A LINKAGE AND THEY ARE SEARCHING, HE SAID, FOR A POLITICALLY VIABLE WAY TO PUT THE ONUS FOR THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE ER/RB WEAPON ON THE SOVIETS. CHAMBERS

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NNN

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